

TESTIMONY OF THE HONORABLE JOE BARTON (TX-06)

Before the

House Committee on Transportation & Infrastructure Subcommittee on
Aviation

July 12, 2006

Chairman Mica, Ranking Member Costello, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today on an issue that is very important to my constituents and the North Texas region as a whole. I appreciate your willingness to schedule this hearing and allow Members of the Texas delegation to speak on the subject of the Wright Amendment.

It's no secret that I have been a strong proponent of keeping the Wright Amendment as it stands. I have supported the covenant between the cities of Dallas and Fort Worth for many years because I believe the best public policy for the North Texas region is to have competing airlines, not competing airports. Today, you will hear from signatories to a new agreement intended to firmly cement the role of DFW Airport and Love Field, and put the efforts for immediate repeal of the Wright Amendment to rest.

The parties have acted in good faith to negotiate an agreement that will give our region and the traveling public resolution on this issue and leave time for public and private stakeholders to plan for final repeal in eight years. In the interim, I expect consumers will reap the benefits of immediate thru-ticketing at Love Field. And once enacted, this agreement will make clear what the

parties may and may not do to keep the bargain in place.

This agreement before you today was hammered out with give and take on all sides. It was a deliberative process which considered valid concerns and unique factors of operation that have benefited the growth of the Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex since the beginning of the Wright Amendment. The result is a carefully crafted agreement that has the support of Dallas and Fort Worth, as co-owners of DFW Airport. Both cities have a stake in the economic viability of DFW Airport, and are doing what is best for the future.

DFW Airport is a growing, world-class, international airport that can handle the volume and diversity of flights to and from our region, and this agreement respects that fact. I continue to hope that Southwest will one day fly out of DFW Airport and compete head-to-head with other airlines, as I believe consumers would benefit greatly and the capacity exists. It is very likely that this agreement will give other carriers the certainty they need to begin operations out of DFW Airport and fill empty gates left by Delta.

Finally, this agreement ensures that Love Field will continue to offer an important alternative for consumers while not diminishing the capacity for competition available at DFW Airport. Growth at Love Field will be restricted, as it is a land-locked airport that should not be reconstituted for greater traffic. DFW Airport is the premier, economic engine of the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex and should be where new growth and investment takes place. Love Field will be reduced to 20 gates over time, and this will allow the residents of the area peace of mind concerning pollution, noise, traffic, and safety concerns.

I emphasize the importance of this gate limitation because it provides the assurance that DFW Airport can continue expanding. I view this agreement as facilitating a “super” airport, where the terminals at DFW Airport serve national and international destinations, and Love Field’s gates provide a regional function with select national routes offering direct competition via thru-ticketing. Importantly, after eight years the Wright Amendment as it exists today will be repealed. This is truly the best of both worlds for consumers in Texas and throughout the country.

Mr. Chairman, local leaders have negotiated a thoughtful, viable alternative that should be supported. I commend everyone involved for their efforts. As the laws affecting Love Field were created at a federal level, any modification must come through the United States Congress. I will continue to work on this issue with my North Texas colleagues and with Members of this Committee. Thank you again for the opportunity to speak here today on this important topic.